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SUBJECT: CROATIA ABOUT TO COMPLETE EU QUESTIONNAIRE, SAYS OUTGOING DEPUTY MINISTER OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

1. ALTHOUGH ICTY COMPLIANCE COULD CAUSE PROBLEMS, CROATIA IS WELL ON TRACK IN ITS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION EFFORTS. THAT IS WHAT OUTGOING DEPUTY MINISTER OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, MIRJANA MLADINEO, TOLD US AUGUST 28, ON HER LAST DAY ON THE JOB. SHE STARTS SOON IN BRUSSELS AS AMBASSADOR TO CROATIA'S EU MISSION. SHE TOLD US THAT LINE MINISTRIES GENERALLY KEPT INTERNAL GOC DEADLINES TO COMPLETE THE CANDIDACY QUESTIONNAIRE DELIVERED BY ROMANO PRODI IN EARLY JULY. THE WORK OF THE MINISTRIES, SHE SAID, WILL BE VETTED BY OCTOBER AND DELIVERED TO BRUSSELS SHORTLY THEREAFTER. SHE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SOME 29 QUESTIONS, COVERING MOSTLY ECONOMIC STRATEGIES, HAD BEEN SENT BACK TO THE RELEVANT MINISTRIES FOR MORE WORK -- BUT FOR THE MOST PART THE WORK WAS ON TIME.

2. STRESSING CROATIA'S NEED TO KEEP AMBITIOUS DEADLINES IN ORDER TO MOVE THE PROCESS ALONG, MLADINEO SAID SHE HOPED THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION WOULD APPROVE CROATIA'S CANDIDACY BY APRIL 2004 -- A TIMELINE WHICH WOULD ALLOW THE GOC TO START NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE EU BY THE FOLLOWING FALL. TIMING IS CRITICAL, SHE STRESSED; CROATIA WANTS TO START NEGOTIATIONS BEFORE THE ACCESSION OF ANOTHER TEN NEW MEMBER COUNTRIES SET FOR NEXT SPRING. MLADINEO GAVE CREDIT TO THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE PACE OF ITS WORK: IT HAS ACCOMPLISHED THE COMPREHENSIVE TASK OF ANSWERING THOUSANDS OF QUESTIONS NEEDED FOR ITS EU CANDIDACY IN A MATTER OF MONTHS IN AN ELECTION YEAR. FOR ITS PART, THE PARLIAMENT HAS ADJUSTED TO EU STANDARDS SOME FIFTY LAWS IN TIMELY FASHION, MANY OVER RECENT WEEKS. THOSE INCLUDE THE LABOR ACT, BROADCAST MEDIA ACT, ANTI-MONOPOLY ACT, FOOD ACT, AND GENDER EQUALITY ACT.

DARK CLOUD  
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3. THE BIGGEST CLOUD ON THE HORIZON, MLADINEO CONCEDED, WAS THE STABILIZATION AND ACCESSION AGREEMENT (SAA) -- WHICH HAS STILL NOT BEEN RATIFIED BY THE UK AND THE NETHERLANDS; THEY ARE HOLDING OUT OVER CROATIA'S HANDLING OF ITS ICTY OBLIGATIONS. THE DEPUTY MINISTER REGRETTED INCLUSION OF CROATIA'S LEADING INDICTED WAR CRIMINAL, ANTE GOTOVINA, BY NAME NEXT TO MLADIC AND KARADZIC IN THE RECENT SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION OVER THE TRIBUNAL'S WORK. THIS WAS UNHELPFUL AND UNFAIR, SHE SAID -- ADDING, HOWEVER, THAT, EVEN IF FULL SAA RATIFICATION IS DELAYED OVER CROATIA'S RECORD ON COOPERATION WITH THE ICTY, THE WORK OF HER MINISTRY WOULD MOVE IN PARALLEL TO THE SAA PROCESS. (THE BRITISH CHARGE CONFIRMED TO US AUGUST 29 THAT, IN PRACTICAL TERMS, THE EC WOULD NOT LIKELY ACT POSITIVELY ON CROATIA'S APPLICATION, THE "AVIS," BEFORE THE SAA IS RATIFIED BY ALL EU MEMBERS.)

COMMENT  
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4. THE POLITICAL CHOREOGRAPHY OF CROATIA'S EU BID IS LOOKING A BIT MORE AWKWARD THAN IT DID A FEW MONTHS AGO. WHAT PM RACAN WANTS TO DO IS GET THE EU QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETED AND DELIVERED TO BRUSSELS IN TIME TO CALL ELECTIONS, WHICH ARE WIDELY EXPECTED IN NOVEMBER. WHILE THE EC BUREAUCRACY ASSESSES WHAT WILL BE THOUSANDS OF PAGES OF DOCUMENTATION, RACAN AND HIS CURRENT COALITION PARTNERS WOULD CAMPAIGN -- TRUMPETING THE PRIORITY THEY PLACE ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. HOWEVER, UNLESS ALL CURRENT EU MEMBER STATES RATIFY THE SAA, RACAN WILL HAVE SOME EXPLAINING TO DO. AND BY NEXT YEAR, THE 10 NEW MEMBERS COULD IN EFFECT BE HANDED, AS CURRENT MEMBERS HAVE, A VETO OVER CROATIA'S SAA. RACAN MAY BRISTLE AT THIS PROSPECT -- PARTICULARLY WITH RELATIONS WITH SLOVENIA LOOKING INCREASINGLY STRAINED OVER A MARITIME DISPUTE.

FRANK

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